

Message Text

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EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, UN, LE, SY, IS, NO

SUBJECT: GON REQUEST FOR INFO ON LEBANESE FORCES

1. THE LEBANESE ARMY UNIT IS COMPOSED OF SOME 650 MEN.
THE BULK OF THIS GROUP IS DRAWN FROM THE LEBANESE ARMY'S
FIRST BRIGADE STATIONED IN THE BEKAA VALLEY. FIRST
BRIGADE IS COMMANDED BY THE BROTHER OF THE LEBANESE
ARMY COMMANDING GENERAL, BOTH MARONITES.

2. DURING THE 1976 CIVIL CONFLICT, THIS GROUP REMAINED
MORE OR LESS INTACT AFTER THE BULK OF THE LEBANESE
ARMY DISINTEGRATED. THE SYRIANS, WHEN THEY MOVED INTO
LEBANON IN FORCE, APPARENTLY SUBORNED THIS GROUP OR
INTIMIDATED IT. THE SYRIANS MAY HAVE PAID THEM, BUT

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APPARENTLY DID NOT USE THEM MILITARILY.

3. AT THE END OF THIS CIVIL CONFLICT IN 1976, THE
GROUP RETURNED TO THE LEBANESE ARMY FOLD. IT REMAINS A
MIXED FORCE OF MAINLY SHIA MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS.

4. US MILITARY TEAM RECENTLY VISITED THE UNIT IN QUESTION,

AND WAS IMPRESSED WITH ITS NEW COMMANDER, A MARONITE.

5. THE LEBANESE TOLD US THAT THE ORIGINALLY-PLANNED 500 MAN UNIT IS 60 PERCENT SHIA MUSLIM AND 40 PERCENT CHRISTIAN, AND HALF THE CHRISTIANS ARE MARONITE. IN ADDITION, THE DEPUTY TO THE MARONITE COMMANDER IS A SHIA MUSLIM. THIS COMPOSITION IS BROADLY REFLECTIVE OF THE COMPARATIVE CONFESSIONAL MIX OF THE INHABITANTS OF SOUTH LEBANON.

6. SENDING THE UNIT WAS A TOUGH DECISION FOR THE LEBANESE. IT IS HARD TO BELIEVE THEY WOULD CHOOSE A UNIT OF DOUBTFUL LOYALTY, KNOWING THAT IT WOULD BE EXPOSED TO CHALLENGES FROM THE IRREGULAR MILITIAS, THE PALESTINIANS, AND THE LEBANESE LEFTISTS. LEBANESE HAD ARGUED EARLIER THERE WAS A CHANCE TROOPS MIGHT DESERT OR BE INTIMIDATED INTO JOINING ONE OR ANOTHER OF ARMED FACTIONS AND MILITIAS IN SOUTH LEBANON. IT IS ALSO AN UNDER-EQUIPPED FORCE, AND THE CONCERNS THAT IT IS GOING TO ROLL UP THE 4,000-ODD MEMBERS OF THE IRREGULAR MILITIAS ARE GROSSLY EXAGGERATED. THESE MILITIAS HAVE ARMOR, ARTILLERY, AND SOLID DEFENSIVE POSITIONS.

7. THE ABOVE IS SUBJECT ONLY TO THE CAVEAT THAT WE IN THE DEPARTMENT DO NOT HAVE INSTANT INFORMATION ON THE 150 MEN ADDED TO THE ORIGINALLY DESIGNED FORCE OF 500. EMBASSY
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BEIRUT: PLEASE COMMENT. WE ARE SURE, HOWEVER, THAT THEY ARE NOT SYRIANS. VANCE

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